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ABSTRACT

To provide a broad view of writer's block and the composing process, this annotated bibliography includes 100 sources that discuss (1) early views of blocking, e.g., Freud's warning about internal critics; (2) contemporary curatives, e.g., cognitive therapies that purport to change a writer's inhibitory self-talk; (3) successful writers' accounts of past blocking, e.g., Joan Didion's recollection of feeling she had suffered a small aphasic stroke; (4) scientific assessments of writing problems, e.g., Daly and Miller's Writing Apprehension Scale; (5) differences in conceptualizing and treating blocks, e.g., psychoanalytic vs. behavioral; and (6) ways to make writing less painful for all writers. (SRT)

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Causes and Cures of Writing Blocks: An Annotated Bibliography

Robert Boice

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Causes and Cures of Writing Blocks:
An Annotated Bibliography

One hundred critical summaries of examples from the literature on writing blocks convey a sense of early views of blocking (e.g., Freud's warning about internal critics), of contemporary curatives (e.g., cognitive therapies that purport to change a writer's inhibitory self-talk), of successful writers' accounts of past blocking (e.g., Joan Didion's recollection of feeling she had suffered a small aphasic stroke), of scientific assessments of writing problems (e.g., Daly and Miller's Writing Apprehension Scale), of differences in conceptualizing and treating blocks (e.g., psychoanalytic vs. behavioral), and of ways by which writing can be made less painful for all writers. Taken together, these sources provide a broad view of blocking and of the composing process, one that may suggest more eclectic approaches to the study of writing.

The literature on writing blocks has accumulated in diverse places. Its authors often show little awareness of precedents and parallels to their own studies and musings. But the pity of that neglect goes beyond formal scholarship; much of this literature makes for fascinating and useful reading.

I selected the 100 examples that follow to display the evolution, the heterogeneity, and the landmarks in experiential accounts and in research about blocking. Inclusion does not necessarily speak to excellence, but more likely to representation of a genre (e.g., art psychotherapy; humor), to perspectives on causes and types of blocking (e.g., fear of failure), to curatives (e.g., writing before editing), or to research in related areas (e.g., test anxiety; procrastination).

1. Adams, J. L. (1978). Conceptual blockbusting. New York: W. W. Norton.

This popularized book on creative blocks reviews rituals writers use to ensure productivity (e.g., Schiller's desk with rotten apples) and psychological speculations about creativity (e.g., a creative person is sensitive to both the needs and limitations of his/her unconscious). Given this overview, Adams proposes five kinds of "emotional" blocks: a) fear of mistakes, b) distaste for chaos, c) judging rather than generating ideas, d) inability to incubate ideas, and e) excessive or minimal levels of motivation.

2. Amabile, T. M. (1985). Motivation and creativity: Effects of motivational orientation on creative writers. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 48, 393-399.

Amabile promotes the popular notion that extrinsic motivation produces less creativity in writing than does intrinsic motivation. Her undergraduate subjects produced two simple poems, the first spontaneously, the second after they had rank-ordered their motives for writing from either an intrinsically or extrinsically oriented list. Subjects exposed to the list of intrinsic reasons produced poems that were subjectively rated as more creative than poems by the group exposed to the extrinsic list. Amabile concludes that mere exposure to extrinsic motives can inhibit creativity in writing.

3. Anonymous (1977). Beating writer's block. Time, 110(8), 101.

An unusually good example of humor about blocking, this article chronicles the self-talk accompanying a block. Tactic number one is remembering bromides about blocking:

9:25 a.m. (Try to beat the block by leading off with other

people's quotes.) "Blocks are simply forms of egotism," said Lawrence Durrell."

Tactic number two is facing the aggressive realities of trying to write for publication: "Herman Melville was so wounded by critics that he wrote no fiction at all for thirty years."

12:15 a.m. (word count so far: 385) Short break for inner movie about receiving Nobel Prize for literature. (p. 101)

4. Asimov, I. (1979, 1980). In memory yet green; In joy still felt. New York: Avon.

Isaac Asimov, a most prolific writer, contradicts the usual recommendations of writing teachers; he rarely revises, he deletes transition passages. In these first two volumes of his autobiography, Asimov lists ways to avoid trouble in starting (by beginning as late in the script as practical), to develop a sense of audience, and to avoid blocking:

"What if you get a writer's block?" (That's a favorite question.) I say, "I don't ever get one precisely because I switch from one task to another at will. If I'm tired of one project, I just switch to something else which, at that moment, interests me more." (p. 192, IJSF)

5. Barrios, M. V., & Singer, J. L. (1981). The treatment of creative blocks: A comparison of waking imagery, hypnotic dream, and rational discussion techniques. Imagination, Cognition, and Personality, 1, 89-109.

Forty subjects with creative blocks were exposed to one of four quasi-experimental groups: waking imagery, hypnotically induced dream imagery, rational discussions, and a non-treatment control. Although subjects worked systematically (e.g., imaginal sessions)

Barrios and Singer provide only vague accounts of their results. Apparently, subjects with waking or hypnotically induced imagery unblocked more readily than subjects in the other two groups. An interesting sidelight about the possible role of mental imagery in blocking: subjects with lower levels of guilty or hostile daydreaming at pretreatment were more likely to unblock during treatment.

6. Beck, A. T., Rush, J. A., Shaw, B. F., & Emery, G. (1979). Cognitive therapy of depression. New York: Guilford.

This most readable and useful account of behavioral-cognitive therapies begins with the premise that distressed people are susceptible to kinds of distorted thinking that set up a vicious cycle. Depression leads to a reduced level of activity, which leads to labeling oneself as ineffectual, which leads to further discouragement and immobility--and so on--including increasing passivity and social isolation. The applicability of this approach to blockers is especially evident in advice to writers such as this: Remind yourself that trying to carry out plans is an important first step.

7. Bergler, E. (1950). Does "writer's block" exist? American Imago, 7, 43-54.

As if to illustrate his earlier contention in The Writer and Psychoanalysis (1950) that writers are necessarily neurotic, Bergler launches an emotional attack against the "fallacious arguments" of "naive contemporaries" who criticized his book.

8. Bergler, E. (1950). The writer and psychoanalysis. Garden City, NY: Doubleday.

Bergler, an enormously productive writer on psychoanalytic topics,

offers a curious view of "writing blocks" (the term he claims to have invented). He supposes that a) all writers are neurotic (writing is an oral regression and so is linked to homosexuality and alcoholism); b) all writers write in hope of self-engendered cure; and c) writers block when they, in effect, reject their mothers by unconsciously refusing to write as a substitute for rejecting their mothers' milk. Unfortunately, Bergler communicates disgust for writers and a suspicion that, if successfully psychoanalyzed, many would recognize the wisdom in abandoning writing. Still, Bergler's extensive experience with blockers yields a number of useful insights such as this: Writers too often are motivated by an unhealthy need to indulge in "injustice collecting" (p. 262).

9. Bergler, E. (1955). Unconscious mechanisms in "writer's block." Psychoanalytic Review, 42, 160-168.

   In this follow-up to his The Writer and Psychoanalysis (1950), Bergler presents more studied defenses of his work in terms of its substantial basis ("on clinical analysis of more than 40 writers") and in outlining the four main hurdles to unblocking (e.g., scopophilia--a conflict between exhibitionism and voyeurism). Bergler is especially direct regarding treatment-outcome prospects with blockers: "It is possible to remove the block in approximately 8 months" (p. 164).

10. Block, L. (1984). Overcoming the ultimate writer's block. Writer's Digest, 64, 20-24.

    Block writes humorously to make a basic point about what blocks fiction writers: negative beliefs (e.g., "I don't have enough talent") can turn into self-fulfilling prophecies. Block's article is a rare treatment of blocking in the popularized literature for

aspiring writers.

11. Bloom, L. Z. (1981, March). Why graduate students can't write: Implications of research on writing anxiety for graduate education. Paper presented at the Conference on College Composition and Communication, Dallas.

    Bloom posits a relatively unique agent of blocking as a major cause of writing anxiety among graduate students: prior success in writing that may have come too readily or indiscriminately. She also discusses other blocking factors endemic to graduate school such as mixed social roles of independence and dependence, ambiguous assignments, and undermining spouses.

12. Bloom, L. Z. (1985). Anxious writers in context; Graduate school and beyond. In M. Rose (Ed.), When writers can't write (pp. 119-133). New York: Guilford.

    Bloom, a veteran in conducting workshops for student and professional writers, presents two case studies of dissertation writers. She shows how writers, especially women, bring individualized differences in perception, ability, disposition, and external conditions to their tasks. Bloom's emphasis is on conflicts in those contexts that teachers and mentors might otherwise ignore and, in so doing, help exacerbate into blocking.

13. Boice, R. (1982). Increasing the writing productivity of 'blocked' academicians. Behaviour Research & Therapy, 20, 197-207.

    Six blocked academicians were exposed to experimental paradigms, at least a year in length, where contracted external contingencies (i.e., pressures) helped induce unblocking and quantitative evidence of regular productivity in scholarly writing. The therapeutic approach used with blockers is described in terms of three stages

that precede contingency management: 1) self-monitoring of writing habits and distractions; 2) dealing with resistance to help via techniques such as free/automatic writing; and 3) use of social support for writing by, for example, arranging the aid of colleagues and students in observing undisrupted writing times.

14. Boice, R. (1983a). Contingency management in writing and the appearance of creative ideas: Implications for the treatment of writing blocks. Behaviour Research & Therapy, 21, 537-543.

A commonly stated resistance to entering programs for blocking inspired this article: Many people assume that writing forced by external pressures must be lacking in creativity. This experiment with 27 blocked academicians showed, in contrast to that view, that . . .

> Contingency management of writing productivity seems to facilitate, not impede, the appearance of creative ideas for writing. That is, subjects who were "forced" to write by a powerful external contingency not only produced more written copy but also generated more creative ideas for writing than did subjects who wrote spontaneously. Subjects who were encouraged to write more but who were not pressured to do so with contingencies reported moderate levels of creative ideas. And subjects who voluntarily refrained from writing had minimal levels of logged creativity. (pp. 540-541)

15. Boice, R. (1983b). Experimental and clinical treatments of writing blocks. Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 51, 183-191.

How important is the therapist in effecting unblocking? This experimental study of unblocking in two matched groups of academicians with writing blocks suggests that the techniques may be

more critical than the person administering them. The group that had minimal personal contact in carrying out an unblocking program based around techniques of contingency management showed the same levels of writing output as did the group with individual weekly therapy sessions plus the same techniques. And, as in previous research (Boice, 1982), the experimental manipulations indicated that one thing, contingency management, helped initiate and maintain writing far more effectively than others.

16. Boice, R. (1984). Reexamination of traditional emphases in faculty development. Research in Higher Education, 21, 195-209.

Thirty-two faculty exposed to lengthy behavioral programs for unblocking not only showed regular and persistent success in completing and publishing manuscripts, but also evidenced parallel improvement in dimensions including collegiality, classroom performance, and burnout. Thus, some common excuses for not writing--that it necessarily interferes with teaching, with social life, and with general well-being--are contradicted by the data collected in this project.

17. Boice, R. (1985a). Cognitive components of blocking. Written Communication, 2, 91-104.

Sixty subjects, 40 of them blockers, provided over 5,000 examples of self-talk accompanying the initiation and completion of writing sessions. An inductive procedure of sorting those thought-list cards into reliable and discrete categories produced seven cognitive components of blocking (listed in descending order of importance): 1) work apprehension, 2) procrastination, 3) dysphoria, 4) impatience, 5) perfectionism, 6) evaluation anxiety, and 7) rigid rules. Blockers were more likely than nonblockers to list negative

thoughts and less likely to evidence "psych-up" thoughts during writing sessions.

18. Boice, R. (1985b). Psychotherapies for writing blocks. In M. Rose (Ed.), When a writer can't write (pp. 182-218). New York: Guilford.

This review of psychological approaches to blocking offers two relatively unique approaches to unblocking: 1) descriptions of psychoanalytically oriented therapies, specifically using the theory and methods of Eric Erikson: "What makes Erikson's approach more contemporary is his emphasis on endowing the ego with qualities including trust and hope, autonomy and will, industry and competence, generativity and care" (p. 8); and, 2) a review of the literature on free writing/automatic writing with an experimental demonstration of its efficacy in unblocking.

19. Boice, R. (1985c). Writing without blocking: A scheme for helping professors write productively, painlessly, and successfully. Unpublished manual available from the Center for Faculty Development, California State University, Long Beach, Long Beach, CA 90840.

This self-help manual derives from more than a decade of research-based programs to help blocked academicians. Its step-wise approach includes self-administered tests that diagnose individual patterns of blocking in subareas such as procrastination and impatience. Its treatment format comprises four essential components for unblocking that lasts: 1) learning to generate momentum and ideas for writing, 2) writing regularly and productively, 3) coping with cognitive inhibitions to writing, and 4) learning to make writing both public and publicly acceptable.

20. Boice, R., & Johnson, K. (1984). Perception and practice of writing for publication at a doctoral-granting university. Research in Higher Education, 21, 33-43.

This survey of 685 faculty on a campus where writing for publication is valued highly indicates a preponderance of questionable habits (e.g., writing mostly in binges just before deadlines), a moderate level of functionally discouraging experiences with the editorial process, and a low but still significant level of blocking (12%).

21. Boice, R., & Jones, F. (1984). Why academicians don't write. Journal of Higher Education, 55, 567-582.

The emphases of this review of factors that make writing for publication difficult are: 1) writing is an essential educational experience for teachers that can facilitate development in related areas such as teaching; 2) part of what keeps many prospective writers from writing is traditional mysticism about writing such as the belief that it should be spontaneous, original, and perfect; and 3) another powerful deterrent is an often undemocratic, inhumane editorial process.

22. Boice, R., & Myers, P. E. (in press). Two parallel traditions, automatic writing and free writing: Automaticity's interaction with creativity, unblocking, and consciousness. Written Communication.

Automaticity, effortless writing that comes with freedom from excessive conscious interference, is reviewed in terms of its origins in automatic writing (e.g., spiritism) and its growth into contemporary techniques such as free writing. Boice and Myers characterize automaticity as a dissociation from consciousness, as aids to spontaneity/creativity, and as aids to unblocking.

23. Boudin, H. M. (1972). Contingency contracting as a therapeutic tool in the deceleration of amphetamine use. Behavior Therapy, 3, 604-608.

The subject of this single-case study felt unable to complete her research report without amphetamines. The therapist, using techniques of dubious ethicality, had the subject stay in his home where she earned food, liquor, cigarettes, and a favorite sleeping location by completing typed pages. The techniques evidently worked.

24. Bowers, P. (1979). Hypnosis and creativity: The search for the missing link. Journal of Abnormal Psychology, 88, 564-572.

Bowers explores a concept of great potential importance to understanding blocking, hypnotizability. Her research with students and writers in contexts of storytelling and writing under hypnosis suggests that "high hypnotizables" bring several advantages to creative tasks: 1) they select information in ways that stimulate fantasy, 2) they give imaginative responses more easily, and 3) they let imaginative experiences carry them along unselfconsciously. In other words, "high hypnotizables" write effortlessly, whereas "low hypnotizables" tend to struggle with volitional, effortful means of trying to remain in control of the process. Presumably, although Bowers does not speak directly to this issue, an overly volitional, effortful mode of writing could engender blocking and interfere with the right-brained methods typically used for unblocking.

25. Brande, D. (1934). Becoming a writer. New York: Harcourt Brace.

This recently reprinted classic offers simple, direct writing: "First there is the difficulty of writing at all. The full, abundant flow that must be established . . . simply will not begin."

It offers a clear accounting of writer's block, one that precedes Bergler's (1950) claim to precedence. And it offers a prescription for what Elbow (1973) called free writing as a curative for blocking. The point of practicing effortless writing, Brande notes, is being able to write at any given time: "to teach yourself that no excuse of any nature can be offered when the moment comes."

26. Brian, M., Augusto, F., & Wilson, G. T. (1981). In vivo exposure vs. cognitive restructuring in the treatment of scriptophobia. Behaviour Research & Therapy, 19, 525-532.

An example of the small literature on phobias about writing in public, this article distinguishes scriptophobia from simple phobias like fear of heights:

> Whereas with a simple phobia the avoidance and the fear are both relatively circumscribed, with scriptophobia the fear is much broader than a simple fear of writing. What seems to underlie the fear of writing is a more general social apprehensiveness, of which fear is only one manifestation. (p. 531)

27. Cowley, M. (1978). --And I worked at the writer's trade. New York: Viking Press.

Cowley edited The Paris Review Interviews (1958), a classic series of interviews with famous writers. He reprints the introduction to that series in this book, a reminiscence of a brilliant literary career. Taken together, the anecdotes from the Interviews selected by Cowley provide a unique sense of how writers write and of how they forestall blocking:

> Apparently the hardest problem for almost any writer, whatever his medium, is getting to work in the morning (or in the afternoon, if he is a later riser like Styron, or even at night).

Thornton Wilder says, "Many writers have told me that they have built up mnemonic devices to start them off on each day's writing task. . . . My springboard has always been long walks." (pp. 188-189)

28. Daly, J. A. (1985). Writing apprehension. In M. Rose (Ed.), When a writer can't write (pp. 43-82). New York: Guilford.

The problem with most information about blocking, Daly notes at the outset, is its basis in anecdotes; systematic investigations of writers' feelings about writing are all too recent. Daly's own work on writing apprehension helps correct that traditional oversight by providing a) a reliable and valid questionnaire to assess apprehension, b) a heterogeneous sample of writers and of correlations between apprehension and factors such as self-esteem (writing apprehension is specific to writing) or careers demanding much writing, c) a system of nine interrelated explanations for writing apprehension (e.g., perceptions of writing teachers as sources of punishment), and d) educational/therapeutic programs to alleviate writing apprehension. Daly concludes that types of dispositional attitudes must be matched to appropriate treatments; thus, "real" blocking requires remediation with free writing, whereas procrastination is best treated via time management.

29. Daly, J. A., & Miller, M. D. (1975). The empirical development of an instrument to measure writing apprehension. Research in the Teaching of English, 9, 242-249.

In a landmark article detailing the development of the objective measure of behaviors, emotions, and cognitions related to blocking, Daly and Miller provide a questionnaire, a self-report device modeled after assessments of speech anxiety, to assess writing

apprehension. Its general categories include anxiety about writing in general and experiences with teachers' evaluations. Its 26 items, selected via factor analysis, include "1) I avoid writing, 2) I have no fear of my writing being evaluated, 19) I like seeing my thoughts on paper, 26) I'm no good at writing."

30. Didion, Joan. (1981). Slouching towards Bethlehem. New York: Washington Square Press.

This successful novelist provides an unusually candid account of blocking:

> I went to San Francisco because I had not been able to work in some months, had been paralyzed with the conviction that writing was an irrelevant act (p. 11). . . . There is always a point in the writing of a piece when I sit in a room literally papered with false starts and cannot put one word after another and imagine that I have suffered a small stroke, leaving me apparently undamaged but actually aphasic. (p. 13)

31. Dillon, M. J., & Malott, R. W. (1981). Supervising masters theses and doctoral dissertations. Teaching of Psychology, 8, 195-201.

Dillon and Malott facilitated almost every aspect of getting students through theses and dissertations, from generating literature reviews to eliciting effective guidance from mentors. Their behavioral program emphasized task-descriptions (i.e., goal setting), performance guidelines (e.g., directives on reading journal articles), and a powerful contingency.

32. Dillon, M. J., Kent, H. M., & Malott, R. W. (1980). A supervisory system for accomplishing long-range projects: An application to master's thesis research. Journal of Organizational Behavior Management, 2, 213-227.

Evidently the first experimental study of unblocking with more than a single subject, this article describes a system for overcoming procrastination with five behavioral techniques: 1) written task specification, 2) weekly subgoals or deadlines, 3) weekly monitoring of work habits, 4) weekly feedback from faculty supervisors on the quality of work completed, and 5) added incentives of losing prespecified amounts of money for failures to meet deadlines. Task completion was highest for the 15 master's level students when feedback was in effect (91%) than otherwise (65%).

33. Domash, L. (1976). The therapeutic use of writing in the service of the ego. Journal of the American Academy of Psychoanalysis, 4, 261-269.

This example from a modest literature based around therapies in which patients express themselves via writing has some relevance to blocking: that is, therapeutic writing seems to give patients more control over potentially overwhelming impulses, including a reluctance to write.

34. Downey, J. E. (1918). A program for a psychology of literature. Journal of Applied Psychology, 2, 366-377.

This forgotten paper outlines ways of understanding and enhancing writing skills with attention to processes such as mental imagery, inner speech, rhythm, and literary empathy. Downey suggests interesting distinctions between writers (e.g., prosaic vs. poetic types) and methods of increasing literary productivity (e.g., development of observational skills vs. suspended inhibitions). While she does not mention blocking explicitly, Downey mentions two related problems, lack of momentum and mental laziness. Her solutions for inhibited writing include these: "Think into your

typewriter" and "never stop at the end" (p. 375).

35. Edwards, B. (1979). Drawing on the right side of the brain. Los Angeles: J. P. Tarcher.

One of the most potentially useful sources of help for blockers is not about writing at all. Betty Edwards' bestseller on learning to draw realistically and painlessly uses techniques that can work as nicely with writing. She outlines ways of learning how to visualize things accurately, of acquiring calm confidence in creative abilities, and of utilizing the spatial, relational aspects of the mind.

36-37. Elbow, P. (1973). Writing without teachers. New York: Oxford University Press.

Elbow's little book may rank foremost among helpful sources. His method of treating blocks, free writing, is neither original nor comprehensive. But it comprises the critical first step in getting unblocked and its presentation is convincing, even inspirational. Whatever else, Elbow knows how to induce momentum in writing.

Elbow's sequel to Writing Without Teachers, Writing With Power (Oxford: 1981), may fail in trying to do too much. Power is no less readable or interesting (e.g., an insight into why English teachers are so likely to block, p. 21), but its larger scheme of taking readers beyond free writing into more abstract skills like "voice" somehow loses its compellingness.

38. Flower, L. S., & Hayes, J. R. (1980). The cognition of discovery: Defining a rhetorical problem. College Composition and Communication, 31, 21-32.

This well-known paper emphasizes writing as a problem-solving, cognitive process whereby the most crucial act is finding or

defining the problem to be solved. Flower and Hayes' related insight about blocking is too easily overlooked: myths about the ease of discovering what needs to be said cause some writers to give up too soon.

39. Flower, L. S., & Hayes, J. R. (1984). Images, plans, and prose: The representation of meaning in writing. Written Communication, 1, 120-160.

Flower and Hayes organize the complexity of writing into simple points like this: A writer's knowledge may be stored as visual images, perceptual cues, and other mental representations of meaning that may be differentially difficult to capture in words. Their analysis of the difficulties in translating mental representations and plans into writing points out an obvious place for blocking: The actual shift from mentation to writing often brings hesitation, loss of fluency, and confusion.

40. Freud, S. (1900). The interpretation of dreams (A. A. Brill, 1913, Trans.). New York: Macmillan.

While Freud does not speak directly about writing blocks, he uses an insight from another literary giant, Schiller, to offer one of the best-known explanations of blocking: The first part describes how freely and self-consciously mental events flow when writing is successful: "In the case of a creative mind, however, the intelligence has withdrawn its watchers from the gates, the ideas rush in pell-mell and only then the great heap is looked over and critically examined." The second part is the famous allegory about a "watcher at the gates" and what happens when the "watcher" becomes an internal critic:

You are ashamed or afraid of the momentary and transitory madness which is found in all real creators, and whose longer or shorter duration distinguishes the thinking artist from the dreamer. . . . you reject too soon and discriminate too severely. (p. 80)

41. Friedman, M., & Rosenman, R. H. (1974). Type A behavior and your heart. Greenwich, CT: Fawcett Crest.

This landmark description of the type A personality (the coronary-prone individual who struggles incessantly, aggressively to achieve more and more in less time) suggests a kinship to many blockers: unnecessary, self-imposed deadlines; quest for numbers or quantity (often while procrastinating); inability to accept praise or to praise oneself; belief that there must be time enough to do all important things; and a sense of persecution.

42. Galbraith, D. (1980). The effect of conflicting goals on writing: A case study. Visible Language, 14, 364-375.

Evidently the first published account of treating a blocked writer by a composition teacher, this report of a single subject who postponed and interrupted her writing describes cumulative stages of treatment which produced dramatic success, evidently because once in motion, the subject found that a) writing alleviated writing anxiety, and b) themes and structure emerged spontaneously.

43. Gardner, J. (1983). On becoming a novelist. New York: Harper Colophon.

Gardner, a successful novelist (e.g., October Light) and veteran teacher of creative writing, pays especial attention to the things that often inhibit writing, including blocking: "In his noninspired state, the writer feels all the world to be mechanical, made up of numbered separate parts: he does not see wholes but particulars,

not spirit but matter" (pp. 119-120).

With all his insight and experience, Gardner might be expected to offer some great solutions for blocking. Not so. He evidently believes that blocking depends on forces beyond our control.

44. Goodman, P. (1952) On writer's block. Complex, 7, 42-50.

Inhibited authors, Goodman concludes, are deficient in dissociating their writing from their own actuality. The blocked writer, then, becomes so rigidly bound up with his interpersonal situation that he or she cannot play while writing. Every detail seems relevant; the writing becomes overburdened.

45. Graves, D. (1985). Blocking and the young writer. In M. Rose (Ed.), When a writer can't write (pp. 1-18). New York: Guilford.

Graves, a direct observer of elementary school writers, concludes that children focus on the concerns of the moment and so can get stuck on them. Further, their teachers and parents often do little more than stress the mechanical components of writing in trying to help children; the result of instruction from people with little experience in topic choice or rethinking of information can be a lifetime block in composing. Children, for example, may conclude they have little to say because they can't spell. The child simply says, "I don't know what to write about" (p. 17).

46. Haar, M. D., & Salovey, P. (1984). The efficacy of cognitive-behavior and writing process training for alleviating writing anxiety. Unpublished manuscript, Pacific Graduate School of Psychology.

Fifty-one of the 91 subjects who responded to an advertisement for people with problems about avoiding writing met the standards for inclusion in this study by scoring above criterion level in the

Writing Apprehension Test (Daly and Miller, 1975) on both the Writing Anxiety and the Writing Block subscales of the Writing Problem Profile. They participated in groups with a) cognitive-behavior therapy (i.e., countering negative self-talk about writing) combined with writing process instruction (e.g., free writing); b) writing process instruction alone; or c) no-treatment. Results: "Only the combination treatment resulted in significant improvement on a performance measure, writing quality" (p. 2).

47. Hall, B. L., & Hursch, D. E. (1982). An evaluation of the effects of a time management program on work efficiency. Journal of Organizational Behavior Management, 3, 73-96.

This article provides a thorough review of the literature and research on procrastination (conclusion: there are lots of recommendations for curing procrastination but no data to support them) and a study of four faculty members who had been unable to complete writing tasks on time. Hall and Hursch had their faculty subjects work toward greater emphasis on high priority work by setting up and posting activity schedules and by breaking long-term goals into manageable tasks. Only one of the four subjects failed to manage consistent productivity on important tasks, but even he showed greater efficiency overall.

48. Harris, M. B. (1974). Accelerating dissertation writing: A case study. Psychological Reports, 34, 984-986.

This successful replication of Nurnberger and Zimmerman's (1970) "productive avoidance technique" helped a procrastinating student finish her dissertation on schedule.

49. Hatterer, L. J. (1965). The artist in society: Problems and treatment of the creative personality. New York: Grove Press.

Hatterer discusses multiple causes of blocking in terms of emotional disorders (e.g., depression and withdrawal, hostility, bizarre sexual practices), ritualistic work habits, realistic fears of the lonely drudgery required for creative work, and, for women, the birth of a child. But his prescriptions are vague (e.g., "be patient, listen to his plans for work, and meet his demands for reassurance") and sometimes questionable ("It is best for the artist not to discuss his block with others" (p. 136).

50. Henning, L. H. (1981). Paradox as a treatment for writer's block. Personnel and Guidance Journal, 60, 112-113.

Henning's article is a paradoxically rare contribution on blocking from counseling and educational psychology, a field that specializes in helping students with related problems such as test anxiety. The paradox in the title refers to a therapeutic technique whereby the therapist encourages the patient to engage in the undesired behavior while disguising longer-term motives of the therapy. In this vague report of a cure, Henning provoked a single subject to write by encouraging him to deliberately produce the poor, mistake-ridden copy he so feared. So it was, evidently, that the writer unwittingly overcame his over-perfectionism and began writing regularly.

51. Hinsie, L. E., & Campbell, R. J. (1974). Psychiatric dictionary (4th ed.). New York: Oxford University Press.

Psychiatrists, beginning perhaps with Bleuler's nineteenth-century observation that schizophrenics show blocking in speech patterns, have developed the general notion of blocking as a symptom of psychopathology. This example of a contemporary definition shows how the concept has broadened from its earlier usages in ways that

suggest relevance to some blocked writers:

> block, affect Inability to discharge emotions adequately or appropriately, seen typically in obsessive-compulsives, who often appear cold, unfeeling and emotionally stiff and overcontrolled, and also in some schizophrenics . . . . (p. 99)

52. Hull, G. A. (1981). Effects of self-management strategies on journal writing by college freshmen. Research in the Teaching of English, 15, 135-148.

Hull reports experiments with beginning college writers that indicate the efficacy of two behavioral techniques, self-monitoring and goal-setting, in raising the frequency and amounts of journal writing. Her emphasis, one overlooked by many composition teachers, was "not on inducing writing as a school performance, but on establishing a writing habit outside the classroom" (p. 137).

53. Jensen, G. H., & DiTiberio, J. K. (1983, Spring). The MBTI and writing blocks. MBTI News, 14-15.

MBTI stands for the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, a personality inventory based around Carl Jung's notions of personality types. Jensen and DiTiberio use the MBTI to build a speculative but intriguing typology of personality styles and blocking tendencies. Summarized briefly, their system looks like this: Extraverts need "outer" activities such as oral presentations to avoid blocking; Introverts may block when they try to mentally plan the complete paper before beginning; Sensing types need specific and detailed instructions to write; Intuitive types get into difficulty when their style of letting one idea trigger another escalates into overly complex manuscripts; Thinking types overdevelop clear systems of presentation to the point where many readers see the writing as

little more than an outline; Feeling types, in contrast, get so concerned with audience reactions that they block when unable to conjure up the perfect word or phrase to capture an inner value; Judging types may write before they have collected enough information to establish workable plans and goals; and Perceiving types cast plans in so broad a fashion that they block upon realizing that they may never finish. The best way to avoid blocking, according to Jensen and DiTiberio, is to avoid being locked into the extremes of any one MBTI dimension.

54. Jones, A. C. (1975). Grandiosity blocks writing projects. Transactional Analysis, 5, 415.

This brief, anecdotal account of blocking is unusually substantive. Jones begins with a clear sense of blocking in terms of grandiosity:

> The erstwhile writer may cure him or herself by answering questions such as: "Am I expecting a masterful life work (perfection) when it is only a manageable one unit project?" "Do I have grandiose expectations of myself?" "Am I discounting my ability to do the job?" (p. 415)

Then, for a transactionalist, she sounds surprisingly like a behaviorist in specifying correctives:

> A person can usually move toward successful completion of a writing project after he defines success; that is, he states limits, goals, and steps within his capability. The person's making such a measurable description of the project rids him or her of the first and greatest hurdle to production--a fluctuating definition of success. (p. 415)

55. Kronsky, B. J. (1979). Freeing the creative process: The relevance of Gestalt. Art Psychotherapy, 6, 233-240.

Kronsky is a gestalt psychotherapist (i.e., emphasizes right-brain prescriptions like "letting go" and "living in the moment") specializing in the little-known field of art psychotherapy. She uses her experience as a therapist to posit three causes of blocking: a) a holding attitude where the anxiety of grasping towards life becomes a worse problem than the anxiety it tries to avoid, b) negative self-attitudes, and c) fear of one's own energy and excitement. Solutions suggested by Kronsky include "grounding exercises" (i.e., becoming expert in trusting one's own impulses) and art exercises (e.g., automatic drawings).

56. Kubie, L. S. (1965, June). Blocks to creativity. International Science & Technology, 69-78.

Kubie is an oft-cited author on blocking; he was one of the first writers to lend an aura of science to the topic. His speculation about why blocking occurs: creativity presumably depends on the free flow of preconscious material and is blocked when either the unconscious or conscious mind takes precedence. Kubie's solution to blocking: plan to work during times when the preconscious dominates (e.g., when tired) and to let solutions occur while sleeping. Later authors, armed with more systematic data (e.g., D. N. Perkins, The mind's best work, Harvard University Press, 1981), contest assumptions about the power of incubation as an engine for unblocking.

57. Lamberg, W. J. (1977). Major problems in doing academic writing. College Composition and Communication, 28, 26-29.

Students attending workshops for writing problems produced a list of major difficulties in academic writing (e.g., lack of self-management skills, lack of strategy for the composing process, and

difficulty with teachers' criticisms).

58. Levin, M. (1953). A new fear in writers. Psychoanalysis, 2, 34-38.
A common fear of blockers, one rarely discussed in the literature, owes to doubts of knowing enough, of keeping up with developments in research. So it is, Levin concludes, that writers are more likely than other professionals to enter psychoanalysis. Another fear of blockers, one not often discussed by other authors, arises in the prospect of seeking therapeutic help: If one accepts the therapist as more expert regarding her/his own perceptions, what becomes of one's self-confidence as an artist?

59. Mack, K., & Skjei, E. (1979). Overcoming writing blocks. Los Angeles: J. P. Tarcher.
Mack and Skjei provide the first, and to date, only comprehensive coverage of causes and greatments of blocking. Their book is thoroughgoing in describing the phenomenology of blocking ("You're paralyzed. You feel panicky, terrified, your mind is a blank," p. 15), in discussing reasons for blocking, and in prescribing a sequential process of unblocking in four stages: prewriting activities (e.g., minimizing distractions), organizing a conceptual framework (e.g., profiling a critical reader), writing rough drafts (e.g., a form of free writing called "cooker sheets"), and revising (e.g., cut and paste). Curiously, Mack and Skjei insert disturbing messages that blockers may be weak and unable to help themselves: "mere self-discipline rarely works with a genuinely blocked writer, whose difficulty has recognizable emotional symptoms and some distinct psychological causes" (p. 23).

60. Meichenbaum, D., & Cameron, R. (1974). The clinical potential of modifying what clients say to themselves. In M. J. Mahoney & C. E.

Thoresen (Eds.), Self-control: Power to the Person (pp. 263-290). Monterey, CA: Brooks/Cole.

This landmark chapter on cognitive-behavioral treatments for test anxiety has broad application to blocking. Consider, for example, the three typical kinds of self-statements made by test-anxious subjects: a) they worry about their performance and about how others are doing; b) they ruminate over alternatives and denigrate the task at hand; and c) they obsess about feelings of inadequacy, about anticipated punishments, and about loss of esteem. Once test-anxious subjects are made aware of their negative self-statements, this approach teaches them to react by producing incompatible, "creativity engendering" statements (e.g., "I will defer judgments; I will invoke a no-stop rule; I will relax and let it happen").

61. Mellgren, A. (1976). Hypnosis and artistic concentration. Journal of the American Society of Psychosomatic Dentistry and Medicine, 23, 133-135.

Seventeen of Mellgren's dental patients complained of artistic blocking and of common anxieties, difficulties in concentrating, depression, and other working pains. When subjected to his hypnotic trance, each blocked artist was informed that: "after awakening, he would feel calmer, more self-confident, and would have received a certain inspiration" (p. 134). Three "established artists" then judged the resulting work and, in 13 of 17 cases, noted it superior to prehypnotic work. When three of the same subjects were later exposed to suggestions of failure, they either refused to pick up a pencil or threw it away.

62. Menks, F. (1979). Behavioral techniques in the treatment of a writing phobia. American Journal of Occupational Therapy, 33, 102-107.

This is a single-case study of a student who, prior to treatment, had experienced "panic and agitation when asked to write." Menks applied common palliatives for panic attacks--relaxation techniques that were administered before each of twenty writing sessions. Both kinds of records collected from the subject, of words written and doubting thoughts, showed appropriate changes.

63. Minninger, J. (1977). "Reteachering"--unlearning writing blocks. Transactional Analysis, 7, 71-72.

Minninger's accounts of how unblocking occurs illustrate the colorful language of transactional psychologists:

> Group members contract to leave their Critical Parents "down the hall." . . . As soon as the safety of the workshop situation is tested, most people shift from Adapted Child to Free Child. . . . The author's Child invites their Child to play in a sandbox of words where no other Parent or Adult may enter. (p. 71)

In other words, Minninger got blockers to try free writing.

64. Murray, D. M. (1978). Write before writing. College Composition and Communication, 29, 375-381.

Murray, who champions prewriting exercises, offers advice that should help blockers (e.g., ideas come to a writer because s/he has a mind trained to seek them out). He also provides a memorable quote about inertia and blocking: "The negative force is resistance to writing, one of the great natural forces of nature. It may be called the Law of Delay: that writing which can be delayed, will be" (p. 375).

65. Newton, P. M. (1983). Periods in the adult development of the faculty member. Human Relations, 36, 441-458.

Newton deals with a neglected source of blocking, the predictable and painful stages of adult development. One troublesome period occurs around age 50, a time when failure to have completed the "work" of mid-life transition leads to chronic depression. Older academics in such a dilemma find nothing to maintain a sense of professional pride in their earlier work. They find no inner resources with which to develop in new directions. And they show symptoms of their immobilization in poor teaching and blocking.

66. Nurnberger, J. T., & Zimmerman, J. (1970). Applied analysis of human behavior: An alternative to conventional motivational inferences and unconscious determination in therapeutic programming. Behavior Therapy, 1, 59-60.

Apparently the first data-based study of unblocking, this article chronicles the behavioral treatment of an "ABD" professor unable to write for two years. Nurnberger and Zimmerman's premise is simple: neurotic behaviors including blocking are often maintained because they terminate, avoid, or postpone the anticipation of punishment. So, too, the treatment: the patient wrote out checks to a despised organization with the agreement that a check would be sent on each day that he did not reach his writing output goal. Not surprisingly, he wrote.

67. Oliver, L. J. (1982, November). Helping students overcome writer's block. Journal of Reading, 162-168.

This review for reading teachers teaches techniques to help students overcome blocking. The primary step, Oliver assumes, lies in determining if blockers subscribe to counterproductive rules and

strategies in writing. Once dissuaded from their rigid rules (see Rose, 1980), students should then be stimulated, Oliver argues, via systematic questioning to generate new ideas for writing. Other techniques described here include free writing and paradoxical intention (i.e., "students can sometimes overcome blocking by trying to write badly," p. 167).

68. Osborne, A. (1983, February/March). Will micros eliminate "typing phobia"? The Portable Companion, 11.

Magazines for computer enthusiasts often contain brief articles such as this by Adam Osborne. He assumes that new developments in word processors will help remove phobias or blocks connected with writing; errors are now so easily corrected with a few "key strokes" that prospects of making mistakes no longer matter.

69. Passman, R. (1976). A procedure for eliminating writer's block in a college student. Behavior Therapy & Experimental Psychiatry, 7, 297-298.

Through the 1970s, articles in behavior therapy journals typically reported the results of a single patient and somewhat vague procedures--as in this study of a blocked college student who contracted to earn rewards by completing small segments of writing.

70. Pickering, G. (1974). Creative malady. New York: Delta.

A suspiciously select sample of anecdotes is used to support Pickering's hypothesis that the best writing is done by writers who are physically ill. Indeed, Pickering's anecdotes fit a more parsimonious but overlooked explanation: the quiet seclusion and time for writing available to not only recuperating authors but to many healthy writers as well.

71. Pronzini, B., & Malzberg, B. (1979). Prose bowl. Fantasy & Science Fiction, 57, 135-156.

A delightful example of writing problems viewed cynically by science fiction writers. In this futuristic scenario, writing has achieved the spectator appeal and competitiveness accorded to twentieth century football. Rating: PG.

72. Quaytman, W. (1969). Psychotherapist's writing block. Voices, 4, 13-17.

In the casual style typical of Voices, an in-group journal for psychoanalysts, Quaytman bemoans his writing block of 20 years. Mysteriously cured of blocking, he emphasizes the costs of blocking in failures to communicate vital new ideas and he discounts the arguments he once shared with other cynics--e.g., that too much "crap" is already being published. In a sequel (Ego factors in a psychotherapist's writing block. Journal of Contemporary Psychotherapy, 1973, 5, 135-139) inspired by grateful letters from other blocked therapists, Quaytman sounds less positive: writing is difficult and brings delayed rewards, if any, whereas conversation with one's colleagues is both easier and immediately rewarding. Still, he ends on the upbeat in concluding that writers who write are more emotionally integrated than those who want to but don't.

73. Rainer, T. (1978). The new diary. Los Angeles: J. P. Tarcher.

A neglected source on programs for blockers, perhaps because it is so directly oriented to women who would keep diaries, Rainer's book teems with useful and interesting ideas. Her approach to unblocking and productivity evolved from free-intuitive writing and emphasizes the safety and freedom of writing, initially at least, away from

public scrutiny. In this sense, Rainer's advice amounts to little more than popular free writing techniques. But her experience with writers and their diaries brings insights far beyond those of usual calls to free writing.

74. Ribot, T. (1906). Essay on the creative imagination. Chicago: Open Court.

Ribot, a French psychologist, illustrates an attempt to break the myths held by many blockers about the reliance of creativity on sudden inspiration and good luck with assertions like this: "chance is an occasion for, not an agent of, creation" (p. 163). Ribot's relevance for modern work on writing processes and problems including blocking lies in his analysis of mental operations such as dissociation (e.g., simplication of memories), personification (i.e., of inanimate things), and diffluence (i.e., using vague, indistinct images).

75. Rico, G. L. (1983). Writing the natural way. Los Angeles: J. P. Tarcher.

At first glance, Rico seems to offer little more than an entertaining application of the fad in speculating about split brain mechanisms to writing blocks. Stated briefly, her notion is that natural (i.e., unblocked) writing depends on access to the brain's right hemisphere--the "design mind" with its resources for richness, rhythm, originality, designs, and the inner writer. We get stuck, it follows, when relying too readily on the left hemisphere--the "sign mind" with its predispositions to rational, logical representations and to anxious anticipations of failure. But, the brain metaphors can pay dividends in advice on orchestrating the two hemispheres in tasks like organizing the products of free writing

into a clustered outline, in listening for and developing the natural rhythms of a distinctive voice in writing, and in revising by paring for greater economy and craftsmanship. The exercises in the latter part of this book are unique and valuable in directing blockers into activities that transcend and, so, maintain unblocking.

76. Rose, M. (1980). Rigid rules, inflexible plans, and the stifling of language: A cognitive analysis of writer's block. College Composition and Communication, 31, 389-401.

In this, and in his dissertation completed a year later (The cognitive dimension of writer's block, UCLA), Rose provided the first truly systematic work on blocking by a composition teacher. His premise: rather than asking students if they block, ask them about specific attitudinal processes that may relate to blocking. Rose's sample of freshman composition students indicated that blockers, compared to nonblockers, share qualities including a) shorter drafts, b) more time prewriting and planning, c) premature editing, and d) eight times as many conflicting rules. Indeed, all five of the blockers appeared to use rules (e.g., no-revision strategy) inflexibly and in ways that generally impeded writing.

77. Rose, M. (1985). Complexity, rigor, evolving method, and the puzzle of writer's block: Thoughts on composing-process research. In M. Rose (Ed.), When a writer can't write (pp. 227-260). New York: Guilford.

Here Rose overviews his earlier work on "cognitive" (i.e., the implicit rules used by writers) aspects of blocking. He then conducts a lengthy plea for research on blocking that interweaves cognitive, affective, and situational aspects of writing. Although

he posits schemes such as "triangulation" from sociology as a means of establishing a "rigor of multiple sightings rather than a rigor of singular constraints" (p. 229), Rose brings little new clarity or pragmatism to writing blocks here.

78. Rosenberg, M. (1976). Releasing the creative imagination. Journal of Creative Behavior, 10, 203-209.

Rosenberg met regularly with student playwrights and established a "hypnotic environment" with convincing suggestions that writing would be easy. Evidently the procedure (which includes strong group support) worked to produce more and freer writing. A follow-up demonstration illustrated the possibilities of using hypnotic suggestion to increase the supply of "raw material" on which writers draw.

79. Rosenberg, H., & Lah, M. I. (1982). A comprehensive behavioral-cognitive treatment of writer's block. Behavioral Psychotherapy, 10, 356-363.

This is a single-case study of a graduate student who had procrastinated with his master's thesis. Treatment began with a "task analysis" that indicated a hierarchy of tasks (from least to most difficult) including 1) editing and adding detail to 2) "smoothing."

Next, specific ways in which the subject procrastinated were identified (e.g., listening to records). Then, a work schedule was established to reduce the distracting behaviors while rewarding the activities already outlined in the task analysis. Overall, this intervention produced an immediate and consistent increase in "the number of hours of writing, the use of weekdays, and the self-rated effectiveness."

80. Ross, E. I. (1985). Writing while you sleep . . . and other surprising ways to increase your writing power. New York: Writers Digest Books.

Ross takes popularized techniques for unblocking such as guided imagery a step further, into a scheme for gestating writing in the subconscious mind. But she provides little more than admonishment; writers who don't incubate ideas and energy for writing, despite Ross's enthusiastic accounts of what should happen, may remain stuck. And writers may find little solace in repeating maxims 10 times (e.g., "My article is like the coffee . . . all the necessary ingredients are simmering in my subconscious mind . . . my mind will take the time it needs . . ."). Instead, they may find they've confirmed their worst suspicions of being beyond help.

81. Roth, P. (1983). The anatomy lesson. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux.

In this episode, Nathan Zuckerman (Philip Roth's "alter id") battles disillusionment and blocking ("ten talons clawing at twenty-six letters"):

> This is not the position in life that I had hoped to fill. I want to be an obstetrician. Who quarrels with an obstetrician? Even the obstetrician who delivered Bugsy Siegel goes to bed at night with a clear conscience. He catches what comes out and everybody loves him. When the baby appears they don't start shouting, "You call that a baby? That's not a baby!" No, whatever he hands them, they take it home. They're grateful for his just having been there. (p. 103)

82. Sanavio, E. (1980). A wider model of writer's cramp. Behavior Analysis & Modification, 4, 17-27.

In Europe, compared to America, a common form of writing block is a writer's cramp (i.e., incoordination and muscular spasms, sometimes a functional paralysis of the hand and arm trying to write). I chose Sanavio's article to represent a surprisingly extensive literature on cramping, over 150 years old, because it provides a broad review of theories and treatments. Two aspects of his review stand out: a) cramped writers tend to be hypertensive, conscientious, and controlled; and b) behavioral treatments employing biofeedback and/or muscular relaxation seem most effective. Authors of articles on writing cramps including Sanavio rarely ascribe relevance to other, less dramatic, forms of blocking or to the complex demands of the writing tasks being avoided.

83. Scanlon, L. (1979). Writing groups in an interdisciplinary program or getting around the professorial block. Hartford, CN: Paper presented at the Annual Spring Meeting of the North-East Modern Language Association. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 169 546)

Premise: Blocks among students result from competition for grades and the fear/authority carried by teachers. Solution: Writing groups with peer support and evaluation that allow revision and feedback before papers are submitted for grades.

84. Schuman, E. P. (1981). Writing block treated with modern psychoanalytic interventions. The Psychoanalytic Review, 68, 113-134.

In fact, Schuman offers nothing very "modern" while leading his readers on a merry chase. First, he lists the failures of his predecessors to help blockers. Then, Schuman speaks at length about the reluctance of therapists to interfere with "lingering" and about issues of transference in general. Thirteen pages later, Schuman

finally gets to the maneuver for unblocking his patient: "I asked him, 'Suppose someone said you wouldn't be permitted to write--or submit--your dissertation proposal. What would you do?' He became furious. 'I would do it anyway'" (p. 129). By the next session, the patient had written. But Schuman says nothing about the longer run, of whether this patient completed the larger task of writing a dissertation.

85. Sears, P. (1979). Letter writing: A technique for treating writer's block. Minneapolis, MN: Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Conference on College Composition and Communication. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 176 337)

Freshman composition students learned an 11-step process (e.g., select topic, brainstorm it, categorize the details that emerged) to ease writing. Blocked students added a preliminary step: letter writing.

86. Segal, H. (1984). Joseph Conrad and the mid-life crisis. International Review of Psychoanalysis, 11, 3-9.

Ths psychohistory of Conrad focuses on two related principles derived from psychoanalytic speculation. First, the mid-life crisis revives old, unresolved problems such as depressive anxieties and, in turn, mobilizes creative processes such as writing to help express and overcome the malaise. Thus, Conrad at mid-life but having failed to advance to a position of command as a seaman, began to look inward: "I had given myself to the idleness of a haunted man who looks for nothing but words wherein to capture his visions" (p. 4). Second, the mid-life crisis, if unresolved, leads to creative blocking and even an early death.

87. Seidenberg, R. (1961). The concept of lingering. Psychiatry, 24, 273-277.

Although Seidenberg does not directly tie the psychoanalytic concept of lingering to blocking, he draws useful parallels such as this:

> The encouraging supervisor, not wanting to interfere with the student's "imaginative" process, fails to give any word of discouragement to such a noble endeavor and allows the candidate to get involved in what turns out to be a design for a perpetual motion machine. (p. 274)

Other lingerers include students who put off dissertations to avoid the responsibilities that accompany the newly won status of Ph.D.

88. Shaughnessy, M. P. (1977). Errors and expectations. New York: Oxford University Press.

Mina Shaughnessy's insights into the experience of writing, especially the phenomenology of blocking, are as clear as her writing. Consider her depiction of blocking typical to student writers: "Some writers, inhibited by their fear of error, produce but a few lines an hour or keep trying to begin, crossing out one try after another until the sentence is hopelessly tangled" (p. 7). Shaughnessy shows why feelings of inadequacy are antithetical to the act of confidence and exhibitionism that marks efficient writing (p. 85). And she explains why getting started is the "most difficult" of all writing problems:

> Without strategies for generating real thought, without an audience he cares to write for, the writer must eke out his first sentence by means of redundancy and digression, strategies that inevitably disengage him from grammatical intuitions as well as his thought. (p. 82)

89. Solomon, L. J., & Rothblum, E. D. (1984). Cognitive-behavioral antecedents of procrastination. Journal of Counseling Psychology, 31, 503-509.

This exemplary study of academic procrastination goes beyond traditional considerations (study habits, time management) to other factors that overlap with blocking: evaluation anxiety, difficulty making decisions, lack of assertiveness, fear of success, perfectionism, and perceived aversiveness of the task. A sample of college students produced two main types of procrastinators: the smaller group attributed procrastination to fear of failure. The second group procrastinated because of task aversiveness, although aversiveness was rarely the only reason listed.

90. Sommers, N. (1980). Revision strategies of student writers and experienced adult writers. College Composition and Communication, 31, 378-388.

In the midst of a description of mature, experienced writers (i.e., ready and willing to revise in flexible and multiple ways), Sommers offers a brief aside about blocking. Some writers block because the writing process can be threatening: "Good writing disturbs: It creates dissonance. Students need to seek the dissonance of discovery, utilizing in their writing, as the experienced writers do, the very difference between writing and speech--the possibility of revision" (p. 387).

91. Spitzer, R. L. (1980). Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders (3rd ed.). Washington, D.C.: American Psychiatric Association.

Is a writing block a mental disorder? In the current edition of the "DSM," the official diagnostic guide for psychiatrists, writing

blocks qualify as an "adjustment disorder" (i.e., a pattern of overreaction to an identifiable psychosocial stressor that will eventually remit after the stressor ceases). Specifically:

> 309.23 Adjustment Disorder with Work (or Academic) Inhibition
>
> This category should be used when the predominant manifestation is an inhibition in work or academic functioning occurring in an individual whose previous work or academic performance has been adequate. Frequently there are also varying mixtures of anxiety and depression. Examples include inability to study and to write papers or reports. (p. 301)

92. Stack, R. (1980). Writing as conversation. Visible Language, 14, 376-382.

Critics of research on blocking, especially skeptical journal reviewers, frequently wonder why everyone doesn't assume that blocked writers have nothing to say and, therefore, should be left in peace. Stack's answer:

> Since writing is so patently the property of the powerful, this conviction has the effect of legitimating and perpetuating existing patterns of inequality. We must find a way to give people--people in general, not just the usual select bunch--the chance to discover and delight in the power of the word as a mode of self-representation. Writing is the way we make ourselves heard, and if one is not heard, one is unlikely to listen. (p. 379)

93. Suler, J. R. (1980). Primary process thinking and creativity. Psychological Bulletin, 88, 144-168.

Suler makes an important and oft-overlooked point: access to creativity via primary-process (i.e., primitive-id) thinking

requires a healthy personality. Success in shifting to that level demands a) a secure sense of identity enabling one to cope with illogical and affect-charged aspects of thinking, and b) an interpersonal trust that one's creative work will not necessarily be rejected. Blocking from primary-process thinking may reflect factors such as defiance of authority, a sense of guilt, or a lack of openness to experience.

94. Sulkes, S. (1983). Writer's block--another cause and cure. Journal of Reading, 26, 728.

This note adds a point about blocking to Oliver's (1982) earlier assumption that dysfunctional student writers suffer from rigid rules about writing. Sulkes recounts his experiences with student writers who "froze" on assignments. His solution: order them to write a "paper of irredeemable wretchedness." With this assignment the students wrote about their fears of public ridicule and were, presumably, exorcised of their "demons of failure."

95. Upper, D. (1974). An unsuccessful self-treatment of a case of "writer's block." Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis, 7, 497.

The format used here to joke about blocking, a title followed by a blank page, has appeared in many journals (e.g., B. P. Hermann, Unsuccessful treatment of a case of writer's block . . . Perceptual and Motor Skills, 1984, 58, 350). But Upper's offering has a special significance: It is probably the single best-known article on blocking in psychology.

96. Valian, V. (1977). Learning to work. In S. Ruddick & P. Daniels (Eds.), Working it out. New York: Pantheon, 1977.

Valian offers a firsthand account of blocking for other women struggling with work roles in a male-dominated world. Her

phenomenological descriptions illustrate how stressful an initial attempt at unblocking can be. She is unusually reflective about her reluctance to write. And, her insight about a curative for blocking is as useful as it is interesting:

> Masters and Johnson's book, Human Sexual Inadequacy, gave me the key. In it, Masters and Johnson stressed that sexuality is a natural physiological process with orgasm as a natural end point. They were concerned with the internal roadblocks that prevented full sexual enjoyment. . . . therapy took the form of breaking the sexual act down into its components. . . . The process was then slowly reassembled, with couples moving on to the next component only after they were comfortable with the preceding one. (p. 165)

97. Walsh, R. (1983). Limits of humanistic psychology: Failure of humanistic psychotherapy to alleviate a case of writer's block occurring as a complication of attempted self-transcendence--a self-report. Journal of Humanistic Psychology, 23, 97-98.

This is another in a series of articles whose humor about blocking lies in a title followed by a blank page (see, e.g., Upper, 1974).

98. Wason, P. C. (1980). Conformity and commitment in writing. Visible Language, 14, 351-363.

Wason argues that many authors block themselves by assuming that writing should be volitional. The more realistic view of writing is to "exteriorize" some of the responsibility for writing to preparational activities like free writing. The usual problem, in his view, is the reluctance of intellectuals to accept exteriorization because they hold ideals like self-expression too sacrosanct.

99. Weaver, F. S. (1982). Teaching, writing, and developing. Journal of Higher Education, 53, 586-592.

Weaver attempts to disarm a common excuse among academicians for not writing: the belief that good teaching and writing are incompatible. His argument: The disciplined efforts necessary to fashion a coherent paper will deepen the teacher's understanding and enjoyment of topics for teaching.

100. Wilkerson, M. (1925). The way of the makers. New York: Macmillan.

This delightful compendium of folklore about artistic productivity includes the myth of the inspirational muse . . .

What can I do in Poetry,
Now the good Spirit's gone from me?
Why nothing now, but lonely sit,
And over-read what I have writ. (Robert Herrick)

and the related myth that writers are incompetent to do more important things:

Singing is sweet; but be sure of this,
Lips only sing when they cannot kiss. (James Thomson)